3.3.3.6 Wet Prairie

3.3.3.6.1 Community Overview

This is a rather variable tall grassland community that shares characteristics of prairies, southern sedge meadow, calcareous fen and even emergent aquatic communities. The wet prairies' more wetland-like character can mean that sometimes very few obligate prairie species are present. Many of the stands assigned to this type by Curtis are currently classified as wet-mesic prairies. In wet prairie the dominant graminoids may include Canada bluejoint grass, cordgrass, and marsh wild-timothy, plus several sedge species including lake sedge, water sedge, and woolly sedge. Many of the herbs are shared with the wet-mesic prairies, but the following species are often prevalent: New England aster, swamp thistle, northern bedstraw, yellow stargrass, cowbane, tall meadow-rue, golden alexander, and mountain-mint.

3.3.3.6.2 Vertebrate Species of Greatest Conservation Need Associated with Wet Prairie

Twenty-three vertebrate Species of Greatest Conservation Need were identified as moderately or significantly associated with wet prairie (Table 3-93).

Table 3-93. Vertebrate Species of Greatest Conservation Need that are (or historically were) moderately or significantly associated with wet prairie communities.

Species Significantly Associated with Wet Prairie
Birds
Bobolink
Herptiles
Blanchard's Cricket Frog
Pickerel Frog
Blanding's Turtle
Queen Snake
Butler's Garter Snake
Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake
Species Moderately Associated with Wet Prairie
Birds
Blue-winged Teal
Northern Harrier
Greater Prairie-chicken
American Golden Plover
Upland Sandpiper
Marbled Godwit
Buff-breasted Sandpiper
Barn Owl
Short-eared Owl
Willow Flycatcher
Bell's Vireo
Henslow's Sparrow
Le Conte's Sparrow
Herptiles
Wood Turtle

In order to provide a framework for decision-makers to set priorities for conservation actions, the species identified in Table 3-93 were subject to further analysis. The additional analysis identified the best opportunities, by Ecological Landscape, for protection, restoration, and/or management of both wet prairie and associated vertebrate Species of Greatest Conservation Need. The steps of this analysis were:

- Each species was examined relative to its probability of occurrence in each of the 16 Ecological Landscapes in Wisconsin. This information was then cross-referenced with the opportunity for protection, restoration, and/or management of wet prairie in each of the Ecological Landscapes (Tables 3-94 and 3-95).

Table 3-94. Vertebrate Species of Greatest Conservation Need that are (or historically were) *significantly* associated with wet prairie communities and their association with Ecological Landscapes that support wet prairie.

Wet Prairie	Birds (1)*	Herptiles (6)					
Ecological Landscape grouped by opportunity for management, protection, and/or restoration of this community type	Bobolink	Blanchard's Cricket Frog	Pickerel Frog	Blanding's Turtle	Queen Snake	Butler's Garter Snake	Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake
IMPORTANT							
Central Sand Hills	■		■	■			
Southeast Glacial Plains	■		■	■	■	■	■
Southern Lake Michigan Coastal	■			■	■	■	■
Western Coulee and Ridges	■	■	■	■			■
PRESENT (MINOR)							
Central Sand Plains	■		■	■			■
Southwest Savanna	■	■	■	■			
Western Prairie	■		■	■			

Color Key

■ = **HIGH probability the species occurs in this Ecological Landscape**

■ = **MODERATE probability the species occurs in this Ecological Landscape**

□ = **LOW or NO probability the species occurs in this Ecological Landscape**

*** The number shown in parentheses is the number of Species of Greatest Conservation Need from a particular taxa group that are included in the table. Taxa groups that are not shown did not have any Species of Greatest Conservation Need that met the criteria necessary for inclusion in this table.**

Table 3-95. Vertebrate Species of Greatest Conservation Need that are (or historically were) *moderately* associated with wet prairie communities and their association with Ecological Landscapes that support wet prairie.

Wet Prairie	Birds (13)*													Herptiles (1)
Ecological Landscape grouped by opportunity for management, protection, and/or restoration of this community type	Blue-winged Teal	Northern Harrier	Greater Prairie-Chicken	American Golden Plover	Upland Sandpiper	Marbled Godwit	Buff-breasted Sandpiper	Barn Owl	Short-eared Owl	Willow Flycatcher	Bell's Vireo	Henslow's Sparrow	Le Conte's Sparrow	Wood Turtle
IMPORTANT														
Central Sand Hills														
Southeast Glacial Plains														
Southern Lake Michigan Coastal														
Western Coulee and Ridges														
PRESENT (MINOR)														
Central Sand Plains														
Southwest Savanna														
Western Prairie														

Color Key

= **HIGH probability the species occurs in this Ecological Landscape**

= **MODERATE probability the species occurs in this Ecological Landscape**

= **LOW or NO probability the species occurs in this Ecological Landscape**

*** The number shown in parentheses is the number of Species of Greatest Conservation Need from a particular taxa group that are included in the table. Taxa groups that are not shown did not have any Species of Greatest Conservation Need that met the criteria necessary for inclusion in this table.**

3.3.3.6.3 Threats and Priority Conservation Actions for Wet Prairie

3.3.3.6.3.1 Statewide Overview of Threats and Priority Conservation Actions for Wet Prairie

The following list of threats and priority conservation actions were identified for wet prairie in Wisconsin. The threats and priority conservation actions described below apply to all of the Ecological Landscapes in Section 3.3.3.6.3.2 unless otherwise indicated.

Threats and Issues

- Most sites are small and isolated.
- Past drainage for agriculture had major negative impacts on this community type, and subsequent impacts from surrounding agriculture affected many wet prairie remnants.
- Lack of fire is a problem.
- Past grazing has degraded many sites. Grazing can remove certain plant species and alter the composition of the community.
- Invasives are a major problem, as they can out-compete native species.
- Sedimentation, pollution, and pesticide drift from surrounding agricultural areas can lead to changes in composition, and encourage invasive plants.
- Housing development and urban expansion can limit the opportunity to manage with prescribed fire.
- More information is needed to manage the natural variability of the community type.

Priority Conservation Actions

- Preserve and manage the few remaining sites.
- Protect or restore site hydrology, and limit runoff of nutrients and sediments from agricultural fields and residential areas.
- Restore existing degraded sites of this community type, or revegetate suitable sites.
- Prevent grazing.
- Fire is less frequent here than in other prairie types, but necessary for maintaining the type. Develop educational tools and demonstration areas that promote benefits of prescribed fire, and address liability concerns. Follow existing management guidelines to minimize impacts on sensitive species.
- Continue and support research to find biocontrols for invasives; control spread of new invasives. Control existing invasives on a site-by-site basis.
- Monitor these sites to determine whether management is maintaining native diversity.
- Collect additional data on vegetative structure and composition to resolve classification issues, and provide better baseline information on the composition and structure of the community. In the meantime, the most effective management strategy would be to manage and connect wet prairie with other open grasslands, including wet-mesic and mesic prairies, southern sedge meadow, calcareous fen, emergent marsh, and surrogate prairie grasslands. This would benefit not only obligate prairie specialists, but would be more likely to support area sensitive open habitat species.

3.3.3.6.3.2 Additional Considerations for Wet Prairie by Ecological Landscape

Special considerations have been identified for those Ecological Landscapes where major or important opportunities for protection, restoration, and/or management of wet prairie exist. Those considerations are described below and are in addition to the statewide threats and priority conservation actions for wet prairie found in Section 3.3.3.6.3.1.

Additional Considerations for Wet Prairie in Ecological Landscapes with ***Major*** Opportunities for Protection, Restoration, and/or Management

No Ecological Landscapes with major opportunities for wet prairie have been identified (but please see major opportunity Ecological Landscapes for wet-mesic prairie (Section 3.3.3.7) and southern sedge meadow (Section 3.3.8.14) for related information).

Additional Considerations for Wet Prairie in Ecological Landscapes with ***Important*** Opportunities for Protection, Restoration, and/or Management

Central Sand Hills

Good occurrences have been documented at Fountain Creek Prairie State Natural Area (within Grand River Marsh State Wildlife Area, Green Lake County) and Upper Chaffee Creek Meadow State Fishery Area (Marquette County).

Southeast Glacial Plains

Most prairie sites are small and somewhat isolated. Invasives such as reed canary grass, purple loosestrife, and giant reed are significant management problems in some areas. Good opportunities to manage and restore this type occur at some of the larger wet grassland sites in this Ecological Landscape, such as Scuppernong Prairie in the South Unit of the Kettle Moraine State Forest. Small remnants also occur embedded within other large grassland management opportunities in this Ecological Landscape, such as Bong State Recreation Area (Kenosha County), Waterloo Prairie State Natural Area (Jefferson and Dodge Counties), and Cherokee Marsh State Natural Area (Dane County).

Southern Lake Michigan Coastal

Increasing population levels due to the proximity of a major metropolitan area have resulted in rapidly expanding urban development.

Chiwaukee Prairie is a complex dominated by wet-mesic prairie that also includes wet prairie, mesic prairie, calcareous fen, southern sedge meadow, and oak openings. Coordinated management of Chiwaukee Prairie with Illinois Beach State Park should be explored. Existing prairie remnants should be preserved. Management of stormwater runoff is a major concern in this area, as is maintenance of site hydrology, and continued residential expansion.

Western Coulees and Ridges

Only small, relatively isolated, degraded remnants are known from this Ecological Landscape. Conversion of wet meadow and prairie to marsh has occurred in some constructed impoundments. Reed canary grass is a serious wetland problem in much of this Ecological Landscape. Stands of cordgrass occur in some of the large open wetlands along the Mississippi River.